located at New Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Bangalore and Guwahati are being upgraded by providing them with Computer Aided Design facilities and modern/latest tools and equipments for enhancing quality and productivity to make the products more market competitive. Other measures like upgradation of Metal Handicraft Service Centre, Moradabad for providing better processing facility of surface finishing of metal craft; development of improved tools for wood and metal craft by IIT, Delhi; development of tools, treatment process and finishing techniques by IIT, Mumbai for Cane and Bamboo crafts; setting up of wood seasoning plans at Trivandrum, Jodhpur and Saharanpur for providing seasoned wood for making quality wood products; setting up of common facility centres in wood crafts at Trivandrum and Jodhpur and for Cane and Bamboo crafts at Agartala and Guwahati with better wood/cane and Bamboo processing machines will ultimately contribute towards higher production, reduction in drudgery of artisans, imporve aesthetics and quality of handicrafts resulting in increased exports and higher realization of per unit value.

Pay and Allowance Package for the Armed Forces

*328. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Armed Forces and Government have yet to settle the long pending pay and allowance package for personnel of the Armed Forces; and

(b) if so, the reasons for delay and by when it is likely to be settled?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) A High Level Committee (HLC) under the Chairmanship of Defence Secretary was constituted specifically to consider the anomalies in the pay and allowances of the Armed Forces Personnel arising out of the implementation of the recommendations of the Fifth Central Pay Commission. A Group of Officers under the Chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary further

deliberated on the various recommendations of the HLC and submitted its report to the Government. Orders on most of the issues relating to pay and allowances of the Armed Forces personnel as per the recommendations of the Group of Officers have been issued by the Government on 29.02.2000. There are, however, two issues i.e. Pay Scales of Personnel below Officer Ranks and of Lt. General and equivalent, on which the Government have yet to take a decision because of their wider implications. There issues have been referred to a group of Ministers for consideration.

Safe drinking water

*329. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned "UNDP report calls water bluff", published in the 'Statesman' dated the 11th July, 2000;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto;

(c) what steps are proposed to be taken to provide safe drinking water to the vast majority of people particularly in the rural areas; and

(d) the amount sanctioned in the Ninth Five Year Plan on this account?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Water supply is a State subject and drinking water facilities to rural habitations are provided under the State sector Minimum Needs Programme (MNP). The Central Government only supplements the efforts of the States by providing assistance under the Centrally sponsored Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP). Powers have been delegated to the States to plan, sanction and implement rural water supply schemes. As per the latest